The Lead Board

(define your own species of lead)

Find any great leads lately in your reading or living? Put them up on the lead board. Try coming up with your own classifications or use some I've used below.

Big Potato Leads *Jump into the middle of your story and leave the reader wanting more.*

And suddenly everything stops.

Runa Alison James

Every so often that dead dog dreams me up again.

Dog Heaven Stephanie Vaughn

Snapshot Leads *Create a picture in the reader's mind.*

Abraham Lincoln wasn't the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood 6 foot 4 inches tall, and to top it off he wore a high silk hat. His height was mostly in his long bony legs, and when he sat in a chair he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered about other men.

Lincoln: a photobiography Russell Freedman

The doorman of the Kilmarnock was six foot two. He wore a pale blue uniform, and white gloves made his hands look enormous. He opened the door of the yellow taxi as gently as an old maid stroking a cat.

Smart Alec Kill Raymond Chandler

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My father came home from work on weeknights long after we had eaten our supper and gotten into our pajamas. The six of us watched from the living room while he sat at the kitchen table to have his supper. My mother sat down his dinner before him, steam rising from the plate she'd kept warm over a pot of boiling water. Loading his fork with his knife, he bent to his dinner, not looking up from his plate until he had pushed it away from him empty.

Daley's Girls Catherine Brady

Talking Leads Maybe you want to start with a line or two of dialogue.

"Where is he?"

Barney hopped from one foot to the other as he clambered down from the train, peering through the white-faced crowds flooding eagerly to the St. Austel ticket barrier. "Oh, I can't see him. Is he there?"

Over Sea, Under Stone Susan Cooper

"Where is Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

Charlotte's Web E.B. White

Thinking Leads *Start with a thought inside a character or you.*

Mother taught me to be polite to dragons. Particularly polite, I mean; she taught me to be ordinarily polite to everyone. Well, it makes sense. With all the enchanted princess and disguised wizards and transformed kings and so on wandering around, you never know *whom* you might be talking to. But dragons are a special case.

Talking to Dragons Patricia C. Wrede

As a boy, I never knew where my mother was from--where she was born, who her parents were.

The Color of Water James McBride

Up until I turned twelve years old the kind of friends I had were what you'd expect. They were my own age more or less. Most of them were born here in Serenity along with me. And all of us went to the same school together.

Onion John Joseph Krumgold

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Misleading Leads[1] *Set up expectations, then surprise the reader.*

I have a farm. It has lots of animals. (next page) Fooled ya! It's a toy farm."
Michael,a first grader, from *What a Writer Needs* by Ralph Fletcher

I would like to die peacefully in my sleep like my grandfather, not terrified and screaming like the other people in the car.
Prairie Home Companion Garrison Keillor

Until Columbus reached the New World the people he called "Indians" lived in peace and harmony with one another.
Not so. ***Not So!*** Paul Boller JR,

Set-up Leads *Set-up the action for the whole story in a few sentences.*

This blind man, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night..... I wasn't enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. Sometimes they were led by seeing-eye dogs. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to.
Cathedral Raymond Carver

In the early days of America when men wore ruffles on their shirts and buckles on their shoes, when they rode horseback and swore allegiance to the King of England, there lived in Boston a man who cared for none of these things. His name was Samual Adams. His clothes were shabby and plain, he refused to get on a horse, and he hated the King of England.
Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams? Jean Fritz

This is not a book about my life or yours. It does not hold the secret to success or salvation. It won't strengthen your self-esteem. I don't think it will get me on Oprah. ***I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional*** Wendy Kaminer

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[1] *What a Writer Needs* by Ralph Fletcher Portsmouth NH: Heinemann 1993
See appendix A book information.

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Types of Endings

"Don't write endings, find them," novelist Thomas Williams used to say. Endings grow from beginnings and reveal themselves through clues within the story, characters or ideas. One way to learn about endings is to observe the different ways authors end a story. Here are a few types of endings. Can you find some categories of your own?

The Loop Ending

A loop ending ends at the same place it begins and is probably the most popular way to end a story. Some children's books to illustrate this are ***If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*** by Laura Numeroff, ***Grandfather Twilight*** by Barbara Berger, and ***Barefoot on the Underground Railroad*** by Pamela Duncan Edwards. Does your story want to end the same place it began?

The Surprise Ending

A good surprise ending is not an accident but is planned for by a skillful writer. You can trace the clues by re-reading the story and looking for clues the writer planted. For example, a good mystery story must have a surprise ending but you have to have some clue about the real villain or the reader will feel tricked. Is your story one that wants to throw the reader a curve ball in the last inning? If so, try writing a surprise ending like these books: ***Earthlets***, by Jeanne Willis, ***Her Majesty, Aunt Essie*** by Amy Schwartz, ***The Paperbag Princess*** by Robert Munsch.

The Summary

And to round off tonight's newscast, here are the highlights once again. A summary ending repeats the main points of a story trying to tie together any loose ends. This type of ending works well in speeches that are trying to hammer home a point or snowballing stories like Dr. Seuss's ***Green Eggs and Ham*** or songs like ***The Twelve Days of Christmas*** which snowball along to the end.

The Happy Ending

Most fairy tales have happy endings (depending on whether you are a wolf-lover, of course). A happy ending such as the one in *Cinderella* leaves the reader with no feeling of sadness. Like a good warm blanket, it covers us from the cold of life. Does it want to end happily, or would it be stronger and more real if it ended sadly?

The Mysterious Ending

A mysterious ending leaves a lot to the reader's imagination. This is the kid of ending that leaves a big question mark in the reader's mind. Do you want to keep the reader guessing? Try writing an ending like Lois Lowry does in the book ***The Giver***.

The Sad but True Ending

When we read that Charlotte dies at the end of ***Charlotte's Web*** we are sad. But it has to end that way. Try saving Charlotte and the story loses its power. It becomes a lie. I call this the "sad but true" ending. Does your story need to end sadly? Does your happy ending have a false ring? If so, you may want to write a sad but true ending. Other books include: ***A Bridge to Teribithia*** by Katherine Paterson, ***Where the Red Fern Grows*** by Wilson Rawls, and ***A Taste of Blackberries*** by Doris Buchanan Smith.

(adapted from ***What a Writer Needs*** by Ralph Fletcher)

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